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Eversole et al.

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(54) **TUBE YOKE FOR A DRIVESHAFT ASSEMBLY**

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(60) Provisional application No. 61/377,546, filed on Aug. 27, 2010.

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F16D 3/38 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **F16D 3/387** (2013.01)

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USPC 464/134, 135, 182, 904
See application file for complete search history.

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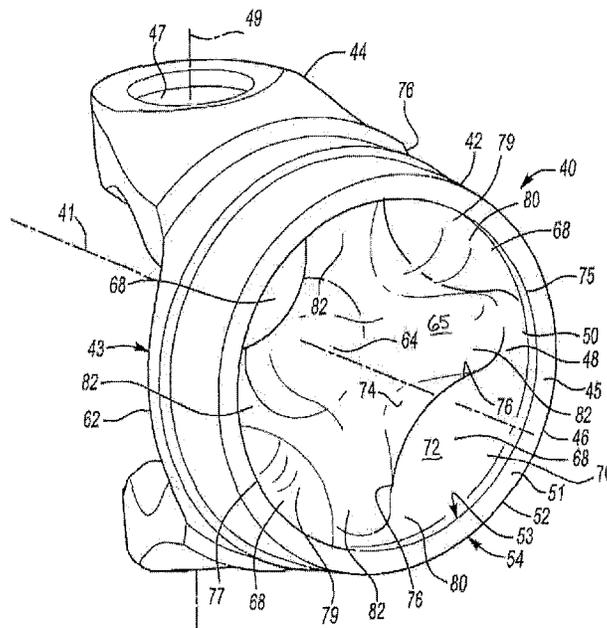
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A tube yoke for a driveshaft assembly includes a tube seat. The tube seat comprises a base, a wall, and a plurality of stiffening ribs. The stiffening ribs extend between an inner surface of the base and an end surface of the wall. Each stiffening rib comprises an outer end portion which is attached to a middle portion and a pair of side portions. The tube yoke also includes a pair of lugs outwardly projecting from the tube seat. Each lug has a crosshole and the crossholes are aligned so as to have a common centerline. Each stiffening rib is oriented at an acute angle with respect to the common centerline of the crossholes and each stiffening rib gradually decreases in thickness from the side portions to the outer end portion and from the middle portion to the outer end portion.

11 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets



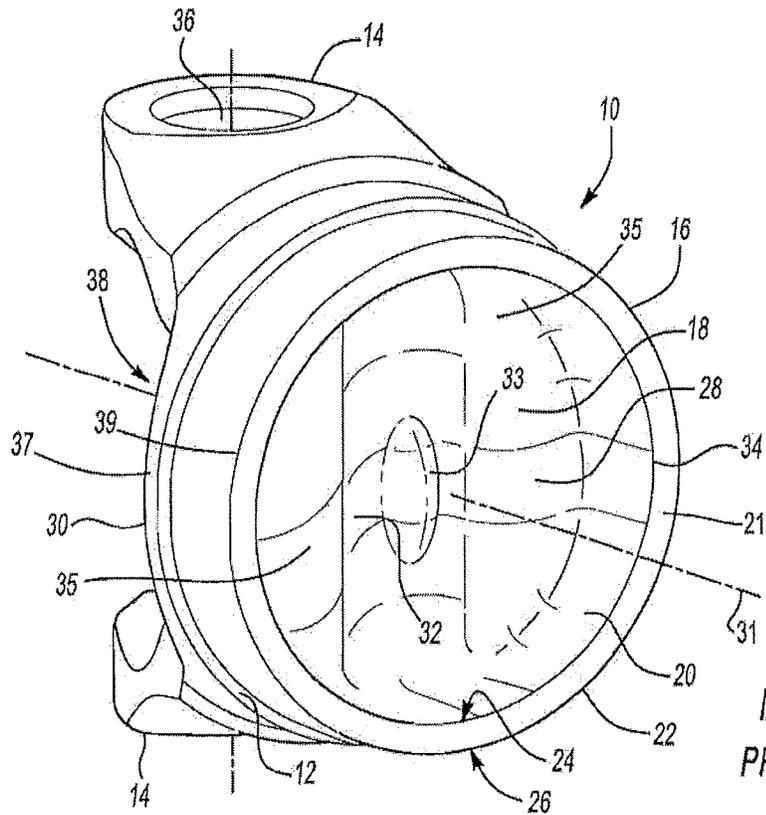


Fig-1
PRIOR ART

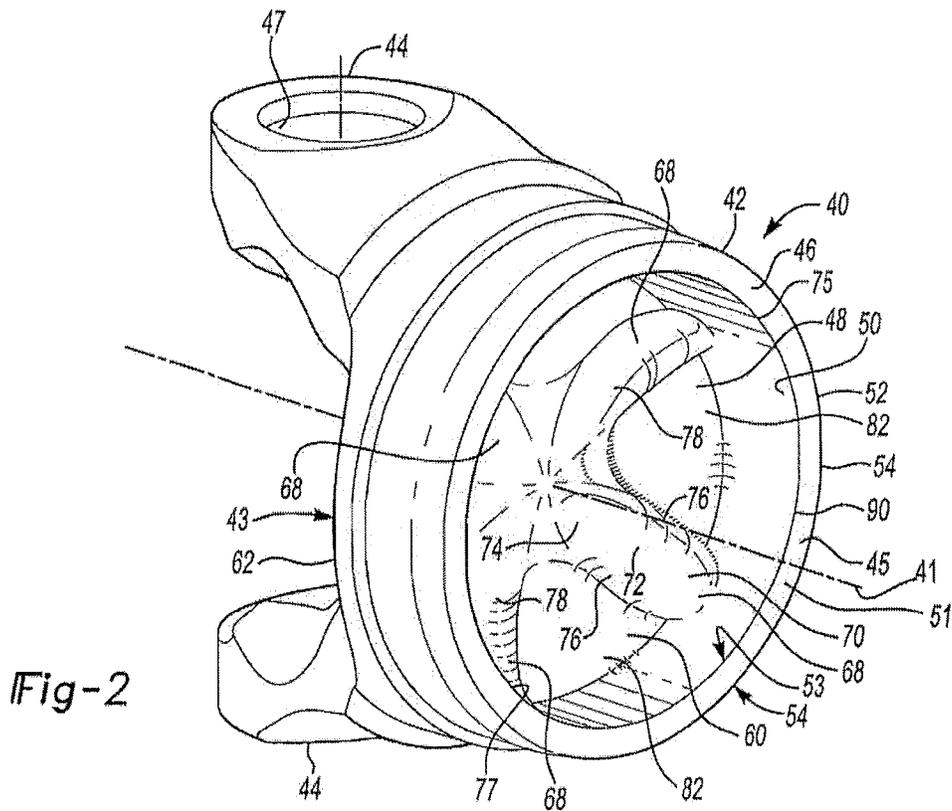


Fig-2

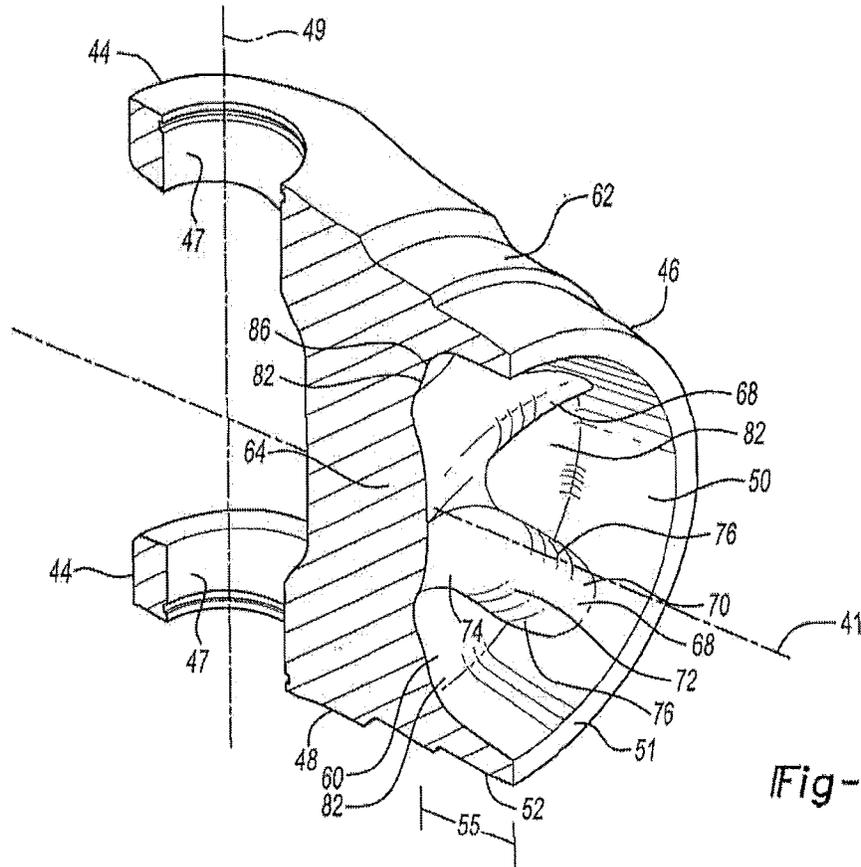


Fig-3

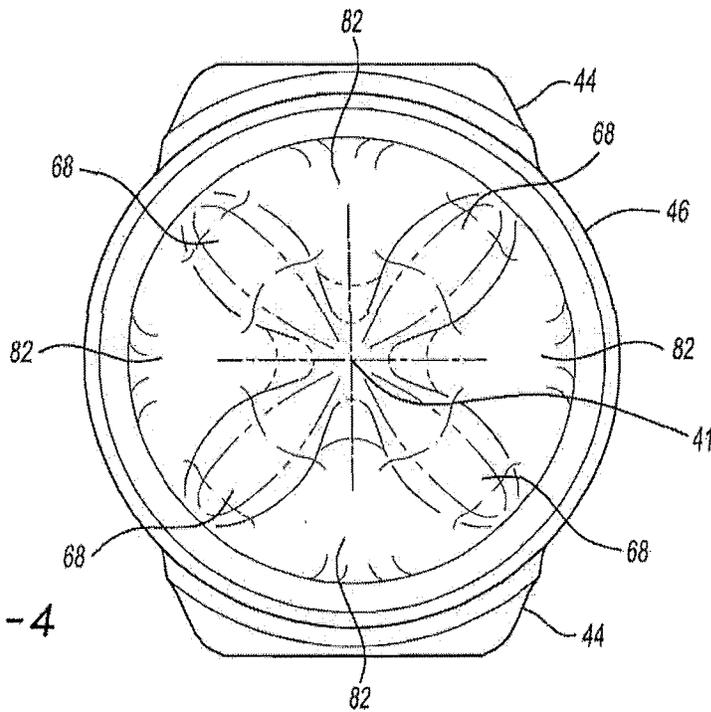


Fig-4

Fig-5

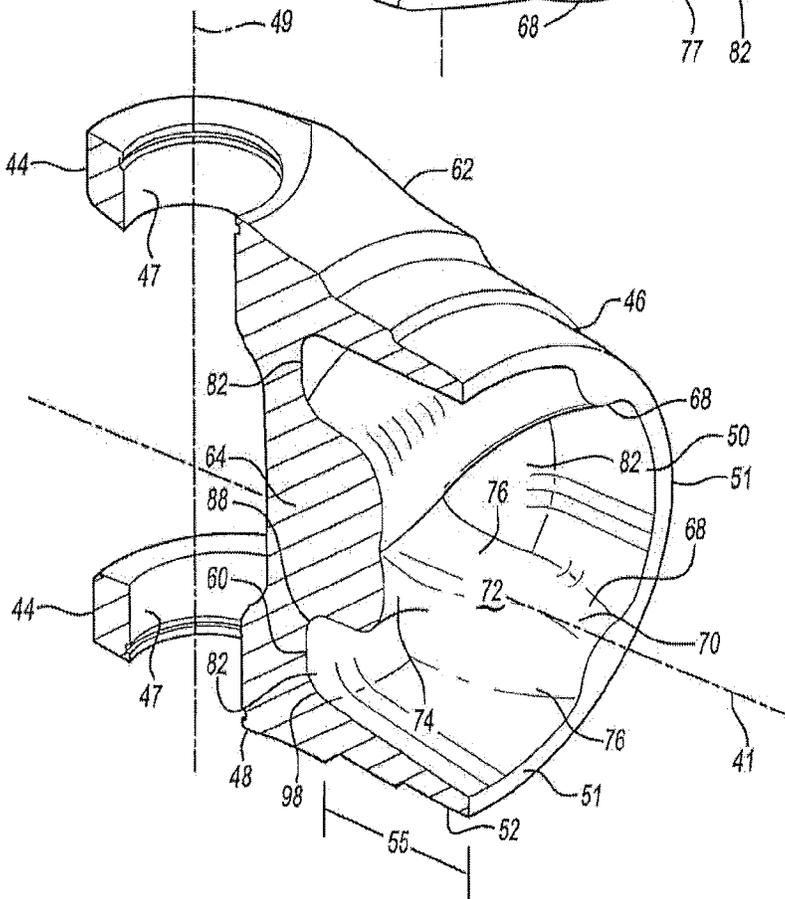
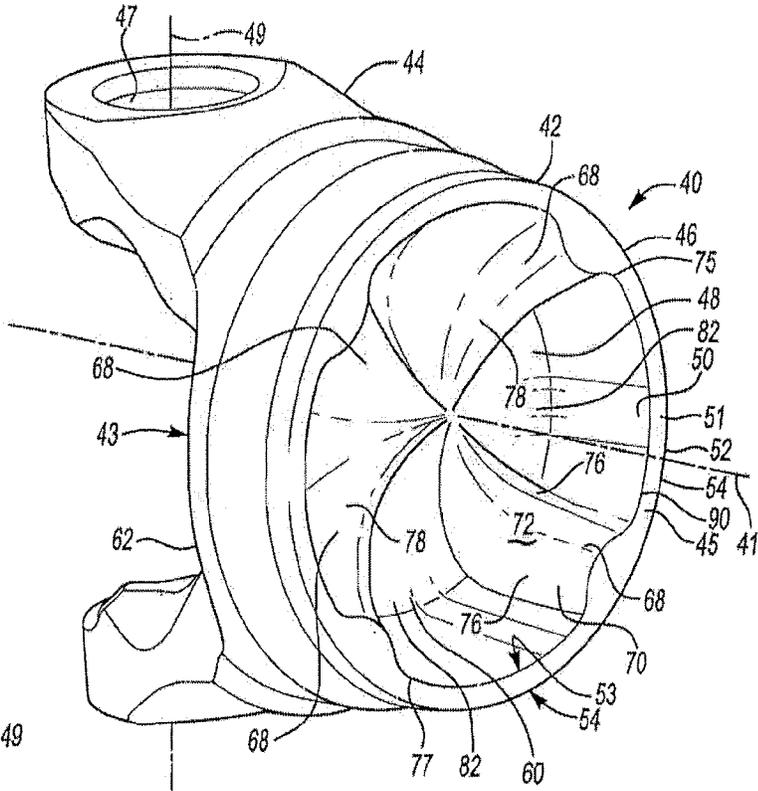


Fig-6

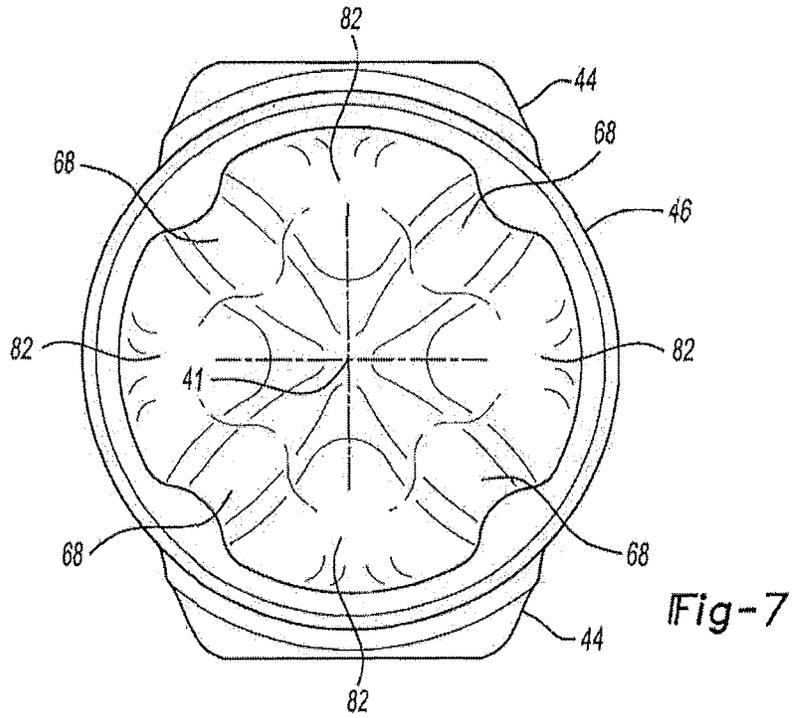


Fig-7

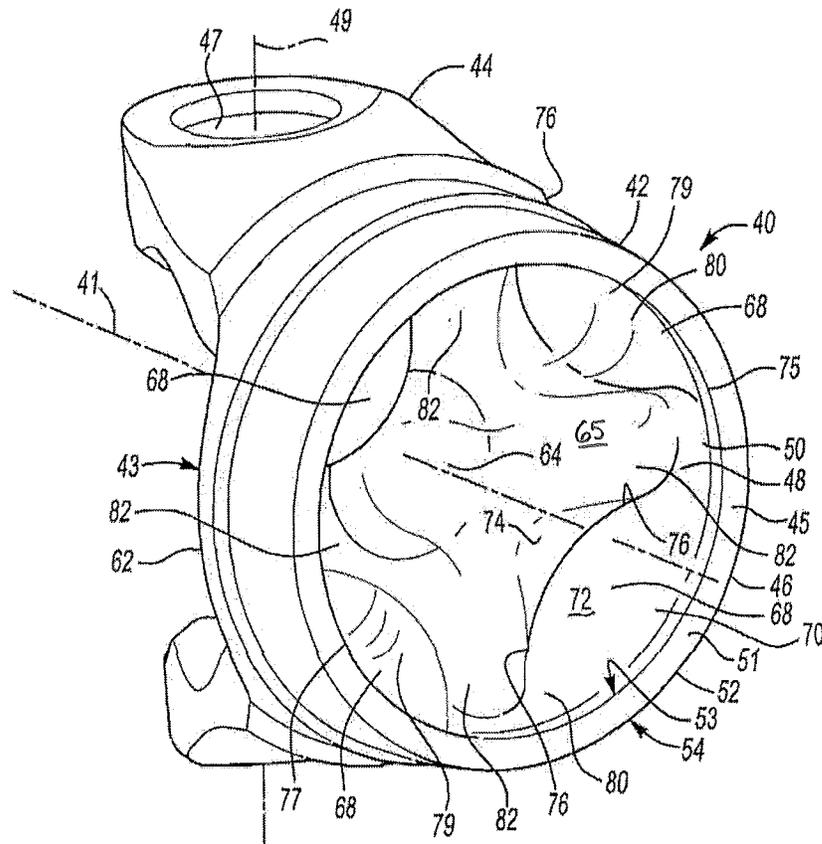


Fig-8

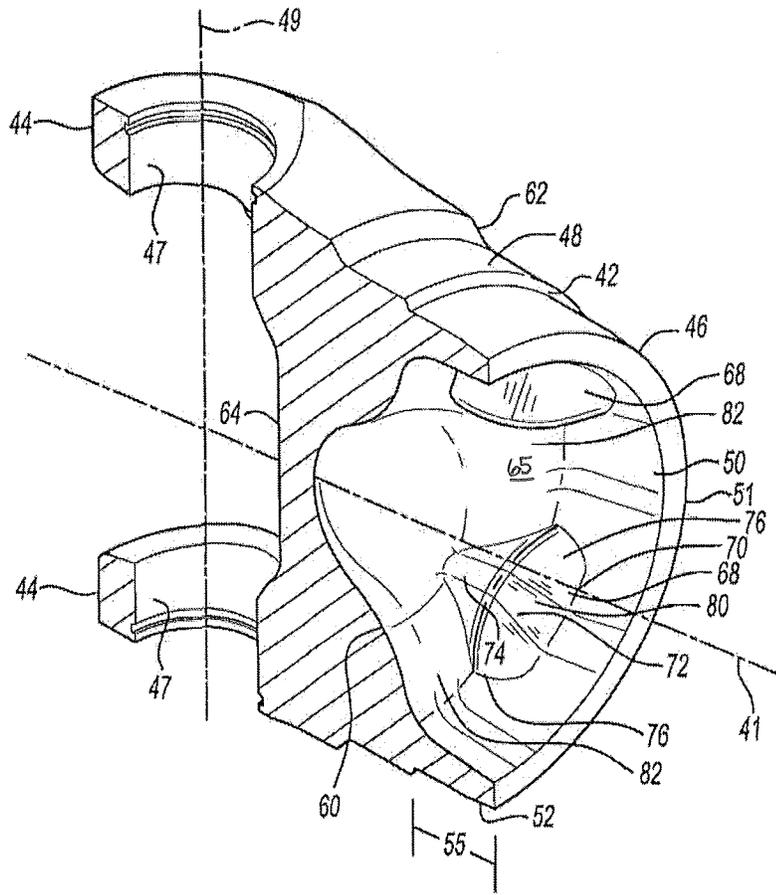


Fig-9

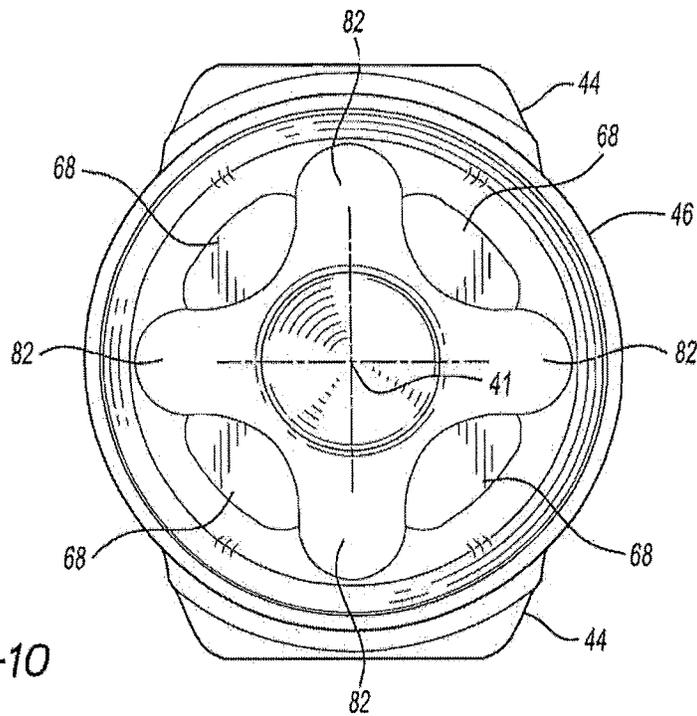


Fig-10

Fig-11

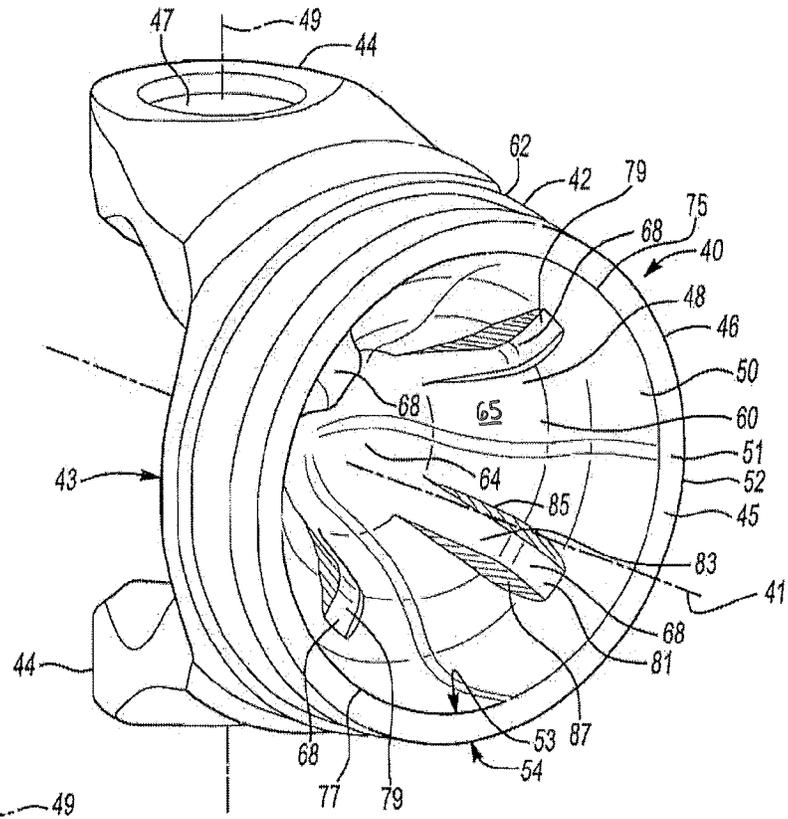
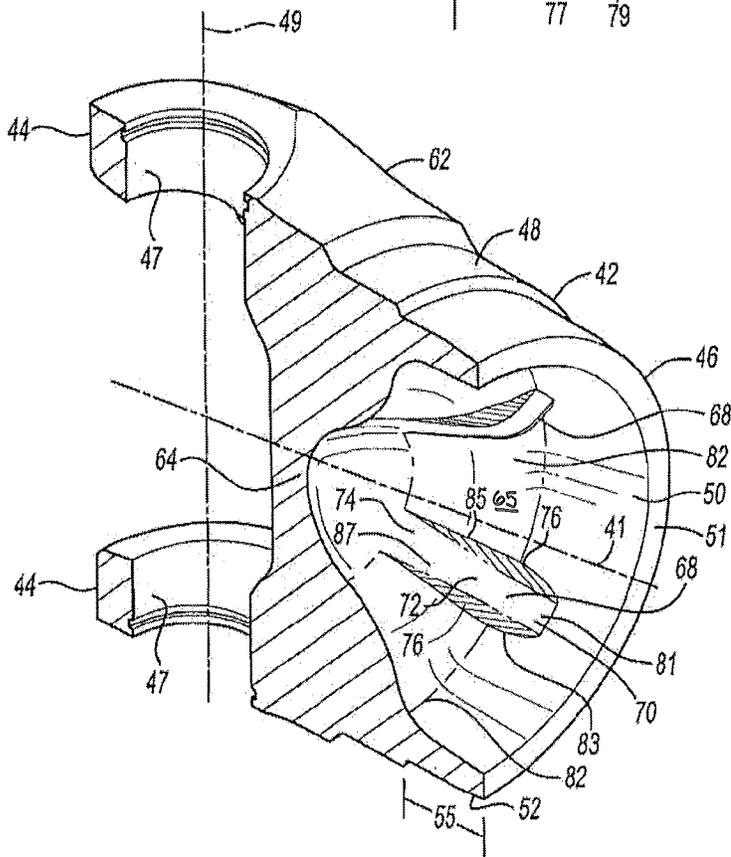
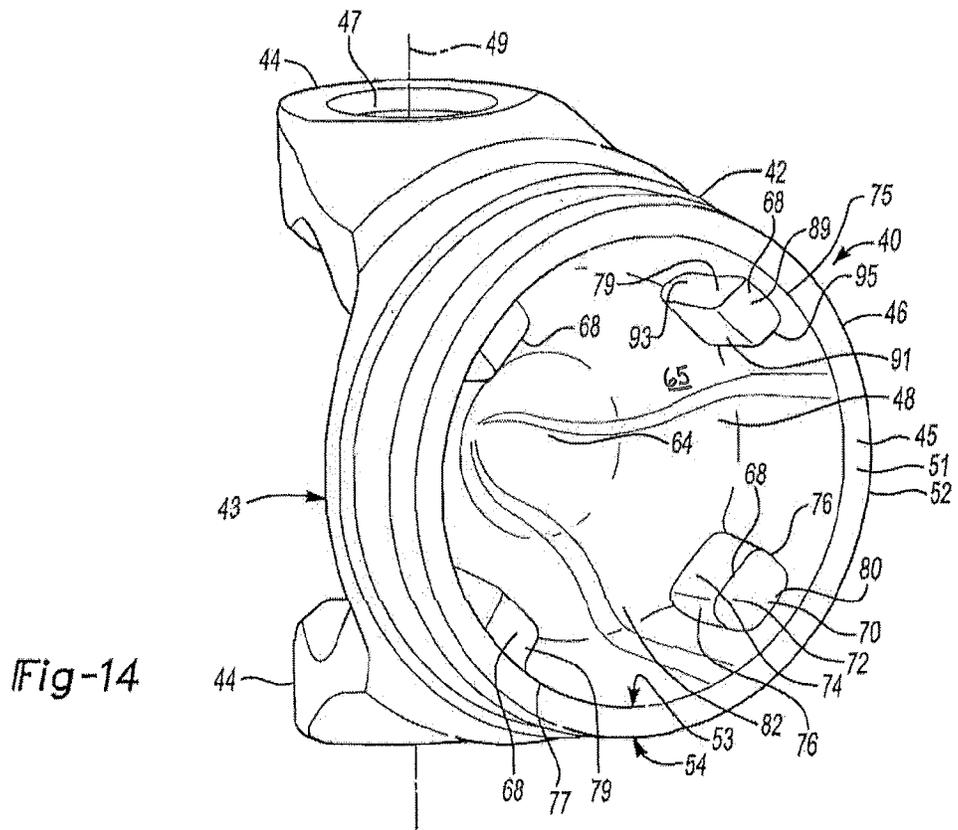
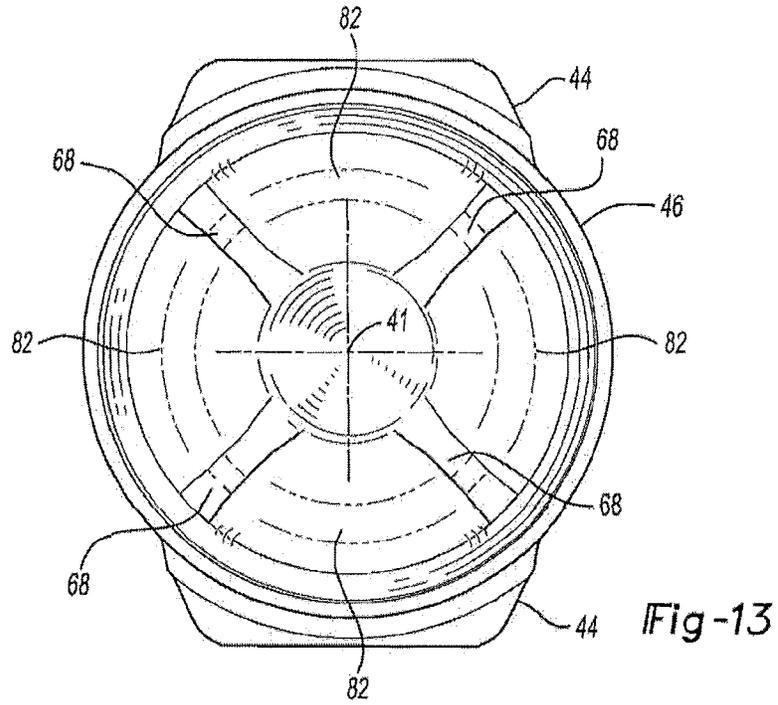
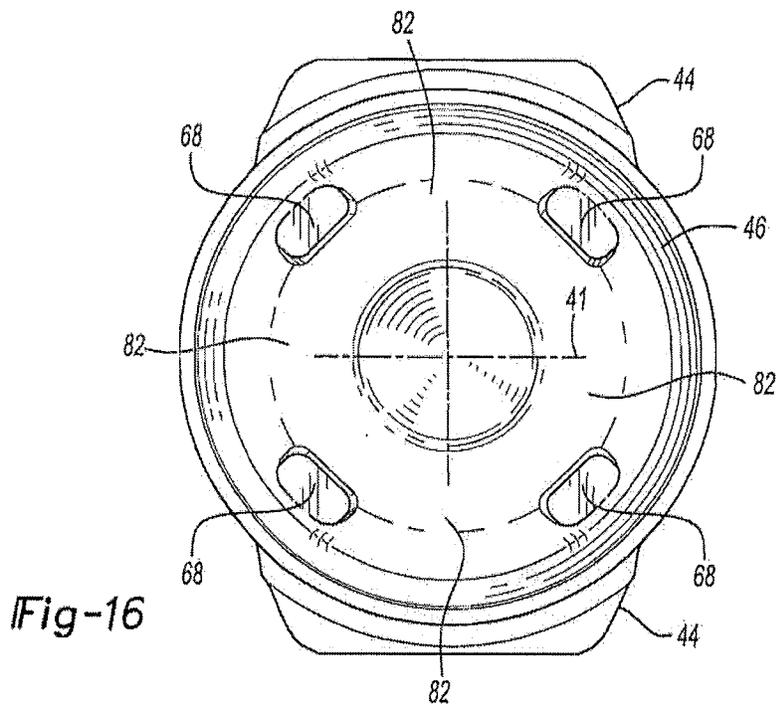
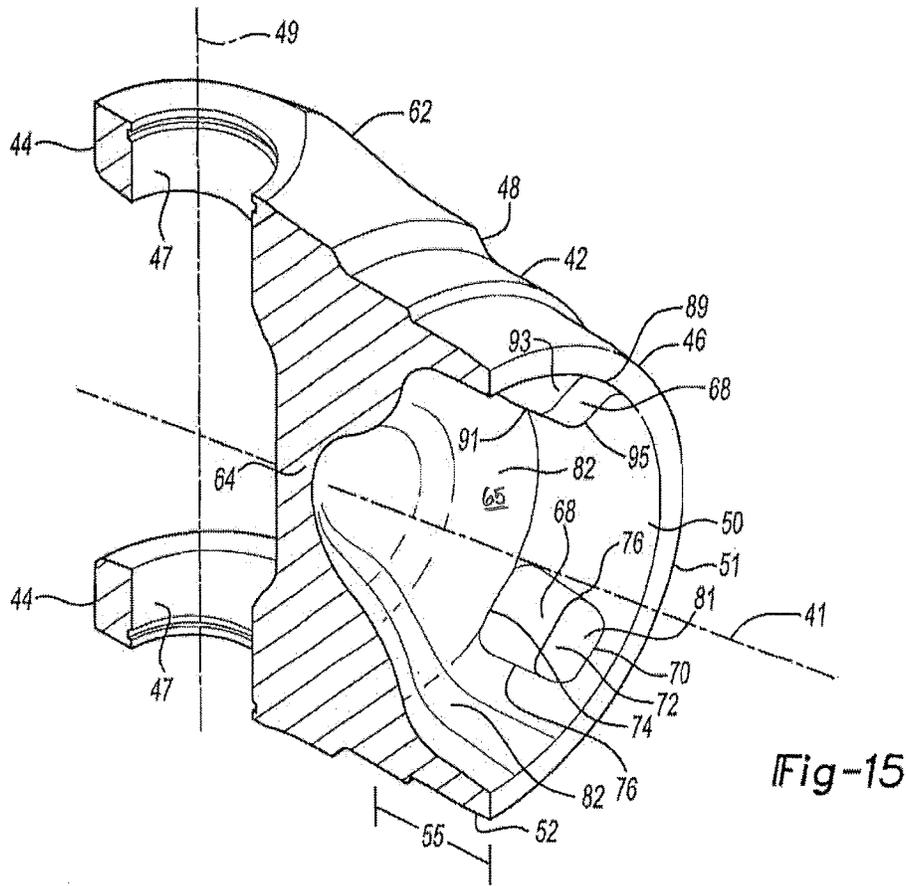


Fig-12







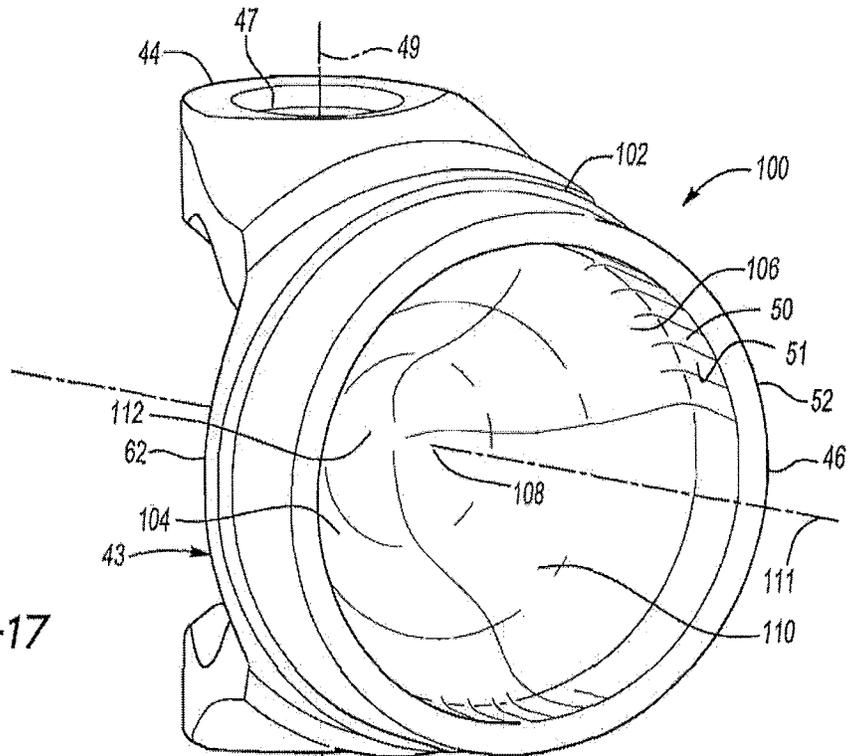


Fig-17

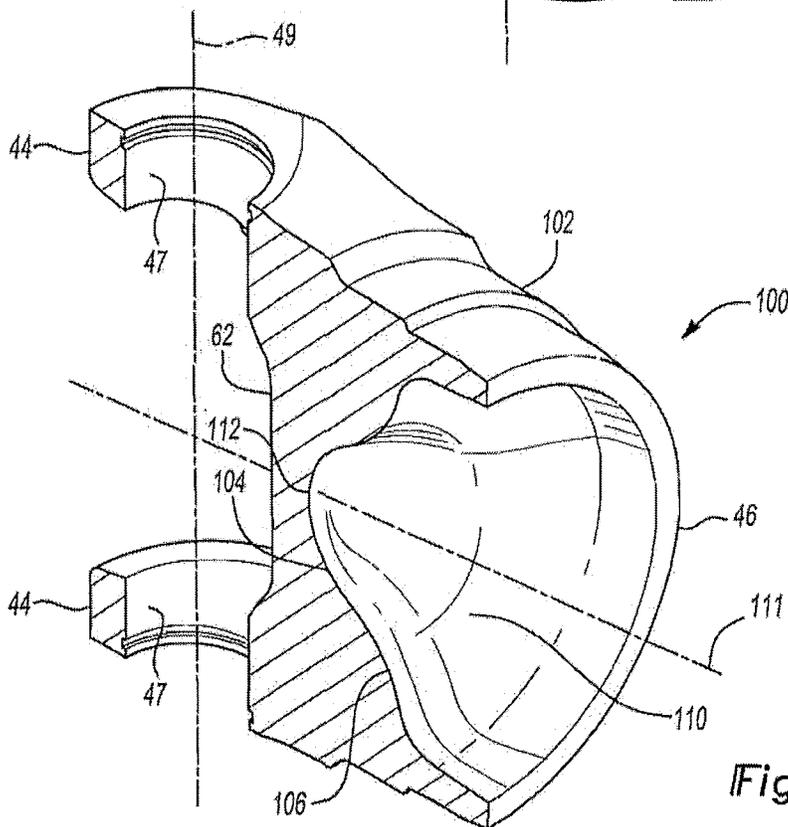


Fig-18

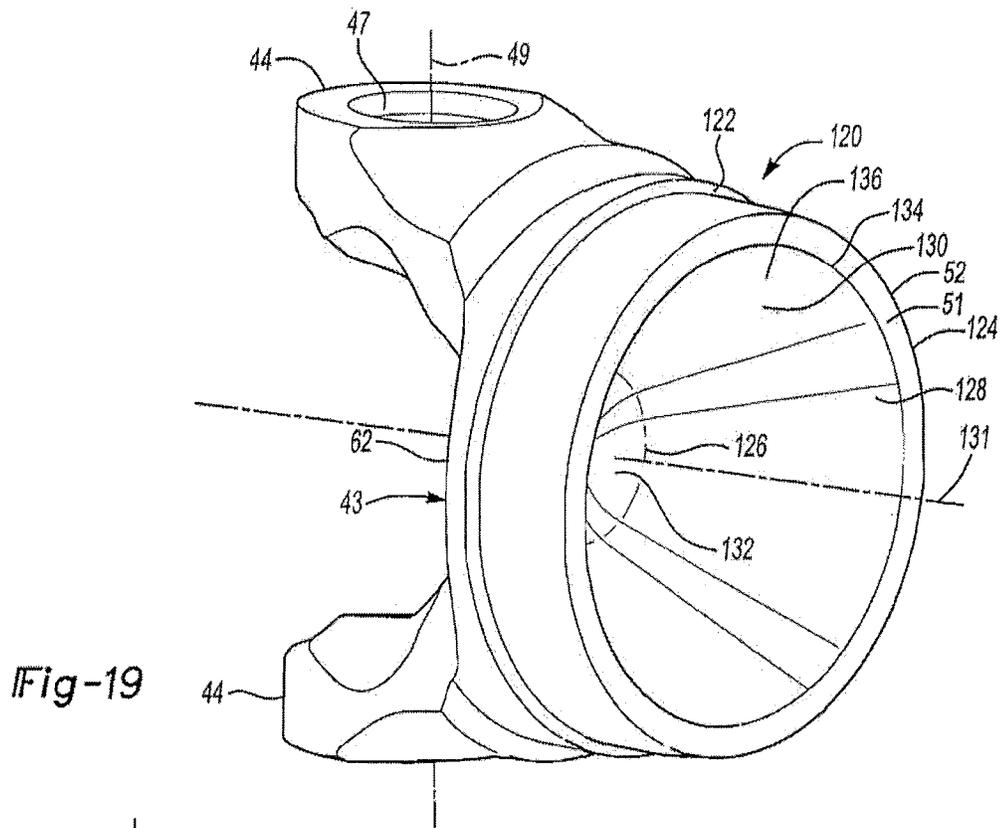


Fig-19

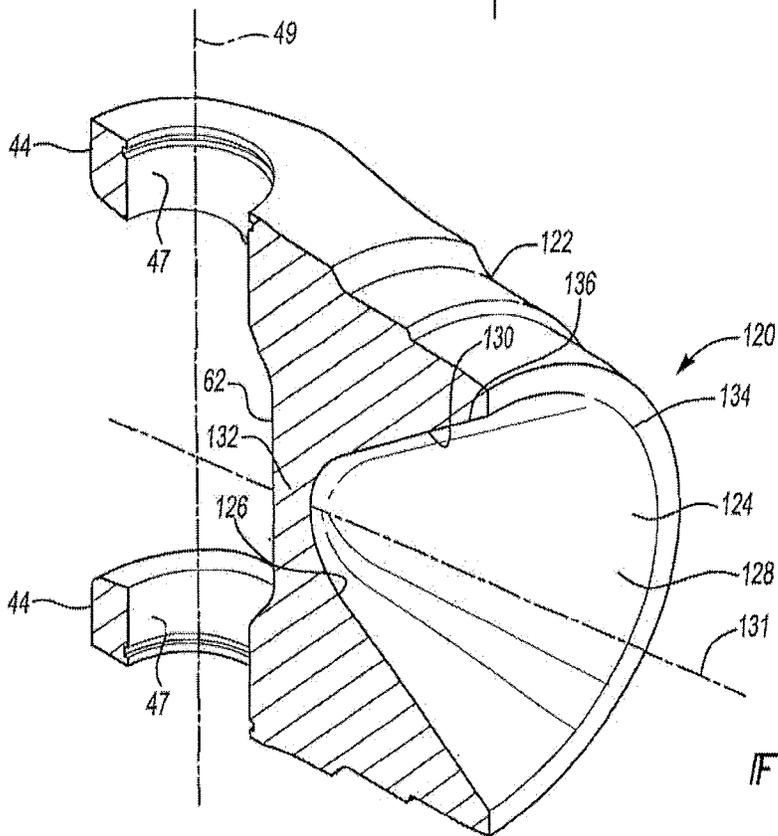


Fig-20

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TUBE YOKE FOR A DRIVESHAFT ASSEMBLY

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit and is a continuation of the Application which was granted Ser. No. 13/261,596, filed Feb. 13, 2013, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety. The Application granted Ser. No. 13/261,596 is pending as of the filing date of this application and is a national stage application of the International Application which was granted serial no. PCT/US2011/001499, filed Aug. 25, 2011, which claims the benefit of the Provisional Application which was granted Ser. No. 61/377,546, filed on Aug. 27, 2010. The International Application granted serial no. PCT/US2011/001499 and the Provisional Application granted Ser. No. 61/377,546 are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates in general to a driveshaft assembly. In particular, this invention relates to a driveshaft assembly having an improved tube yoke design which enhances performance of the driveshaft assembly when torque is applied thereto.

A driveline assembly is used to transmit rotational power from a source, such as an engine, to a driven component, such as a pair of wheels. In a typical driveline assembly, a driveshaft assembly is included. In most cases, the driveshaft assembly includes a driveshaft tube and a tube yoke. The tube yoke usually includes a tube seat, which is connected to the driveshaft tube, and a pair of spaced apart lugs.

The tube yoke is subject to torque loads. The torque loads can cause radial deformation of the tube yoke and, specifically, the tube seat. Radial deformation, and especially non-uniform radial deformation, can be problematic and can be caused when torque is applied to the driveshaft assembly by rotating the assembly in a clockwise direction or when torque is applied to the driveshaft assembly by rotating the assembly in a counterclockwise direction.

Accordingly, it would be desirable to provide an improved tube yoke that reduces the amount of radial deformation which occurs to a tube seat when torque is applied to the driveshaft assembly and enhances the performance of the driveshaft assembly by improving the interaction of the tube yoke and the driveshaft tube.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention is directed to embodiments of a tube yoke for a driveshaft assembly.

In an embodiment, the tube yoke comprises a tube seat. The tube seat comprises a base, a wall, and a plurality of stiffening ribs. The stiffening ribs extend between an inner surface of the base and an end surface of the wall. Each stiffening rib comprises an outer end portion which is attached to a middle portion and a pair of side portions. The tube yoke also comprises a pair of lugs outwardly projecting from the tube seat. Each lug has a crosshole and the crossholes are aligned so as to have a common centerline. Each stiffening rib is oriented at an acute angle with respect to the common centerline of the crossholes and each stiffening rib gradually decreases in thickness from the side portions to the outer end portion and from the middle portion to the outer end portion.

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In another embodiment, the tube yoke comprises a tube seat. The tube seat comprises a base, a wall, and a plurality of stiffening ribs which are attached to the base and the wall. The base gradually decreases in thickness toward a central axis that extends through the base. The tube yoke also comprises a pair of lugs outwardly projecting from the tube seat. Each lug has a crosshole and the crossholes are aligned so as to have a common centerline. Each stiffening rib is oriented at an acute angle with respect to the common centerline of the crossholes.

In another embodiment, the tube yoke comprises a tube seat. The tube seat comprises a base, a wall, and a plurality of stiffening ribs which are attached to the base and the wall. The base comprises an edge portion and a center portion. The edge portion separates the center portion from the wall. The base gradually decreases in thickness from the wall to the center portion toward a central axis that extends through the base. The tube yoke also comprises a pair of lugs outwardly projecting from the tube seat. Each lug has a crosshole and the crossholes are aligned so as to have a common centerline. Each stiffening rib is oriented at an angle of approximately 45 degrees with respect to the common centerline of the crossholes.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a tube yoke known in the art;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of a tube yoke in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 3 is a perspective sectional view of the tube yoke of FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a front view of the tube yoke of FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a tube yoke in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 6 is a perspective sectional view of the tube yoke of FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is a front view of the tube yoke of FIG. 5;

FIG. 8 is a perspective view of a tube yoke in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 9 is a perspective sectional view of the tube yoke of FIG. 8;

FIG. 10 is a front view of the tube yoke of FIG. 8;

FIG. 11 is a perspective view of a tube yoke in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 12 is a perspective sectional view of the tube yoke of FIG. 11;

FIG. 13 is a front view of the tube yoke of FIG. 11;

FIG. 14 is a perspective view of a tube yoke in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 15 is a perspective sectional view of the tube yoke of FIG. 14;

FIG. 16 is a front view of the tube yoke of FIG. 14;

FIG. 17 is a perspective view of a tube yoke in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 18 is a perspective sectional view of the tube yoke of FIG. 17;

FIG. 19 is a perspective view of a tube yoke in accordance with an embodiment of the invention; and

FIG. 20 is a perspective sectional view of the tube yoke of FIG. 19.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

It is to be understood that the invention may assume various alternative orientations and step sequences, except

where expressly specified to the contrary. It is also to be understood that the specific devices and processes illustrated in the attached drawings, and described in the following specification are simply exemplary embodiments of the inventive concepts. Hence, specific dimensions, directions, or other physical characteristics relating to the embodiments disclosed are not to be considered as limiting, unless expressly stated otherwise. Also, although they may not be, like elements in various embodiments may be commonly referred to with like reference numerals within this section of the application.

Additionally, the invention will be described in connection with a passenger vehicle driveshaft assembly. However, it would be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art that the tube yoke and method of reducing the deformation of a tube yoke described herein have applications to commercial and off-highway vehicle driveshaft assemblies. Furthermore, it would be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art that the tube yoke of the present invention could have industrial, locomotive, and aerospace applications.

Referring now to the drawings, there is illustrated in FIG. 1 a tube yoke 10 known in the art. The tube yoke 10 comprises a tube seat 12 and a pair of outwardly projecting lugs 14 attached to the tube seat 12.

The tube seat 12 comprises a wall 16 and a base 18. The wall 16 includes an inner surface 20, an end surface 21, and an outer surface 22. The base 18 has an inner surface 28 and an outer surface 30. The wall 16 is attached to the base 18 and is formed in a unitary fashion with the base 18. The wall 16 and the base 18 are concentric about an axis 31.

The inner surface 20 of the wall 16 substantially defines an inner circumference 24 and the outer surface 22 of the wall 16 substantially defines an outer circumference 26. Typically, the outer circumference 26 is attached to a driveshaft tube (not depicted) to form a driveshaft assembly. When the driveshaft assembly is formed, the base 18 is perpendicular with the driveshaft tube.

Along with the wall inner surface 20, the base inner surface 28 defines a cavity 34. The cavity 34 helps to reduce the weight of the tube yoke 10. The outer surface 30 of the base 18 defines an outer circumference 38 of the base 18. In an embodiment, the outer circumference 38 of the base 18 is greater than the outer circumference 26 of the wall 16. In this embodiment, the difference between the circumferences 26, 38 may decrease gradually from the base 18 to the wall 16.

The inner circumference 24 and outer circumference 26 of the wall 16 may be substantially uniform. As such, the wall 16 may have a uniform thickness. However, the inner circumference 24 of the wall 16 may gradually increase from where the wall 16 is attached to the base 18 to the end surface 21 of the wall 16. Additionally, the outer circumference 26 of the wall 16 may gradually decrease from where the wall 16 is attached to the base 18 to the end surface 21 of the wall 16. Thus, the wall 16 may gradually decrease in thickness from one end portion 37 of the tube seat 12 to the other 39.

In an embodiment, the base 18 has a center portion 32 and edges portions 35. The center portion 32 and edges portions 35 extend from the inner surface 28 to the outer surface 30 of the base 18. The edge portions 35 and are attached to the wall 16 on one end and the center portion 32 on another. The edge portions 35 separate portions of the center portion 32 from the wall 16. The center portion 32 is oriented in a generally perpendicular relationship to the axis 31 and has a generally rounded semi-cylindrical shape which extends from one edge of the inner surface 20 of the wall 16 to an

opposite edge. The center portion 32 may have a raised portion 33 in its center. The raised portion 33 gradually reduces in thickness towards the wall 16.

The lugs 14 are formed in a unitary fashion with the tube seat 12. The lugs 14 are attached to the outer surface 30 of the base 18 and project outwardly therefrom. The lugs 14 are spaced apart from each other by approximately 180 degrees. Each lug 14 has a crosshole 36 which is formed through it. The crossholes 36 are aligned. In transmitting rotational power, the lugs 14 connect the driveshaft assembly to another portion of the driveline assembly (not depicted).

FIGS. 2-16 show additional embodiments of a tube yoke 40.

The tube yoke 40 comprises a tube seat 42 and a pair of lugs 44. Each lug 44 is formed in a unitary manner with the tube seat 42 and projects outwardly therefrom. When forming the driveshaft assembly, the tube seat 42 is attached to the driveshaft tube adjacent an end 45 of the tube seat 42. Preferably, the tube seat 42 is concentric with the driveshaft tube.

The tube seat 42 comprises a wall 46 and a base 48. The wall 46 is formed in a unitary manner with the base 48. In an embodiment, the tube seat 42 has an outer surface, defined by outer surfaces 52, 62 of the wall 46 and the base 48 that has a generally cylindrical shape. In this embodiment, the wall 46 and the base 48 are concentric about a central axis 41.

The central axis 41 extends through the base 48. The base 48 has an inner surface 60 and outer surface 62. In certain embodiments like the ones shown in FIGS. 8-16, the base gradually decreases in thickness toward the central axis 41. When the tube yoke 40 is attached to a driveshaft tube, the inner surface 60 of the base 48 is positioned substantially perpendicularly to the driveshaft tube. The outer surface 62 defines an outer circumference 43 of the base 48.

Additionally, the base 48 has a center portion 64 which extends from its inner surface 60 to its outer surface 62. In an embodiment, the center portion 64 is located equidistant from the wall 46. In certain embodiments like the ones shown in FIGS. 8-16, the base 48 comprises an edge portion 65. The edge portion 65 surrounds the center portion 64 and separates the center portion 64 from the wall 46. Also, in the embodiments illustrated in FIGS. 8-16, the inner surface 60 of the base 48 adjacent the center portion 64 has a generally conical shape. In these embodiments, the conical shape may include a generally semispherical shaped portion. Also, in these embodiments, the base 48 gradually decreases in thickness from the wall 46 to the center portion 64 toward the central axis 41.

The wall 46 is defined by an inner surface 50, an end surface 51, and outer surface 52. The inner surface 50 substantially defines an inner circumference 53 of the wall 46. In an embodiment best shown in FIG. 6, the inner surface 50 of the wall 46 may comprise a fillet 88 adjacent where the wall inner surface 50 and base inner surface 60 are attached. Also, the outer surface 52 of the wall 46 substantially defines an outer circumference 54 of the wall 46. In an embodiment, the outer circumference 43 of the base 48 is larger than the outer circumference 54 of the wall 46.

The wall 46 has a height 55 which can be measured as the distance from the inner surface 60 of the base 48 to the end surface 51 of the wall 46. The position of the inner surface 60 of the base 48 may vary between embodiments of the present invention. Accordingly, the height 55 of the wall 46 may vary between embodiments of the present invention as can the thickness of the base 48.

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To form the driveshaft assembly, the wall 46 is attached to the driveshaft tube. Thus, after forming the driveshaft assembly, the outer surface 52 of the wall 46 abuts the driveshaft tube. In certain embodiments, the wall 46 is annular. Additionally, it may be preferable that the end surface 51 has a uniform thickness for facilitating the attachment of the tube yoke 40 to the driveshaft tube. Therefore, in certain embodiments, the inner circumference 53 and outer circumference 54 of the wall 46 are substantially uniform along the axis 41.

As discussed, the base outer surface 62 and the wall outer surface 52 define the outer surface of the tube seat 42. As illustrated, the lugs 44 project outwardly from the outer surface of the tube seat 42. More specifically, the lugs 44 are attached to the outer surface 62 of the base 48 and project outwardly therefrom.

The lugs 44 are spaced apart from each other by approximately 180 degrees. Each lug 44 has a crosshole 47 which is formed through it. The crossholes 47 are aligned so that they have a common centerline 49. In transmitting rotational power, the lugs 44 connect the driveshaft assembly to another portion of a driveline assembly (not depicted).

The tube seat 42 also comprises a plurality of stiffening ribs 68. The plurality of stiffening ribs 68 are attached to the wall 46 and the base 48. For example, the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 may be attached to the inner surfaces 50, 60 of the wall 46 and the base 48.

The plurality of stiffening ribs 68 reduce the amount of radial deformation experienced by the tube yoke 40 and, specifically, the tube seat 42 when a torque force is applied to the driveshaft assembly. For the purposes of explaining the advantages of the present invention, radial deformation shall refer to a change in the shape of the tube seat 42. Radial deformation, especially non-uniform radial deformation, can occur to a tube seat when torque is applied to the driveshaft assembly in a clockwise direction with respect to the central axis 41 and when torque is applied in a counterclockwise direction with respect to the axis 41.

In the embodiments depicted in FIGS. 2-16, the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 includes four ribs. However, it should be appreciated that the present invention can be practiced with as few as two stiffening ribs and more than four stiffening ribs. Each stiffening rib 68 comprises an outer end portion 70, a middle portion 72, an inner end portion 74, and a pair of side portions 76.

The inner surfaces 50, 60 of the wall 46 and the base 48 and the portions 70, 72, 74, 76 of the stiffening ribs 68 define an inner surface of the tube seat 42. The inner surface of the tube seat 42 extends between the inner surface 60 of the base 48 and the end surface 51 of the wall 46. Portions of the inner surfaces 50, 60 of the wall 46 and the base 48 and the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 may vary between embodiments of the present invention. Thus, portions of the inner surface of the tube seat 42 can vary between embodiments of the present invention.

In certain embodiments, like those depicted in FIGS. 2 and 5, the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 are formed in a unitary manner with each other. In these embodiments, each rib inner end portion 74 is attached to an adjacent rib inner end portion 74 proximate the center portion 64 of the base 48. In other embodiments, like those depicted in FIGS. 8, 11 and 14, the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 are not formed as a unitary body and are not attached to each other. In these embodiments, the inner end portion 74 of each stiffening rib is attached to the inner surface 60 of the base 48 and not to the inner end portion of an adjacent stiffening rib. In these embodiments, the stiffening ribs 68 do not extend radially

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from the wall 46 to the central axis 41 extending through the base 48, instead each stiffening rib 68 terminates adjacent an outer portion of the center portion 64 of the base 48.

Preferably, the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 are formed in a unitary manner with the wall 46 and the base 48. For example, the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 may be formed in a unitary manner with the inner surface 50 of the wall 46 and/or the inner surface 60 of the base 48. However, it should be appreciated that the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 need not be formed in a unitary manner with either the wall 46 or the base 48 to practice the invention.

The wall 46 surrounds the plurality of stiffening ribs 68. As shown in the embodiments depicted in FIGS. 2 and 5, at least one pair 78 of stiffening ribs 68 may extend from an inner edge 75 to an opposite inner edge 77 of the wall 46. However, in other embodiments, like those shown in FIGS. 8, 11 and 14, a pair of stiffening ribs 79 do not extend from inner edge 75 to inner edge 77 of the wall 46. In these embodiments, the stiffening ribs 68 terminate adjacent to and are separated by the center portion 64 of the base 48. As best shown in FIGS. 9, 12, 15, in these embodiments the inner surface 60 of the base 48 adjacent the center portion 64 has a generally conical shape and may include a semispherical shaped portion.

The stiffening rib outer end portions 70 are attached to the inner surface 50 of the wall 46. However, their position with respect to the wall 46 may vary. In certain embodiments, like those depicted in FIGS. 2, 8, 11 and 14, the rib outer end portions 70 are attached to the wall 46 but they do not extend the full height 55 of the wall 46. In these embodiments, the rib outer end portions 70 may extend less than half the height 55, approximately half of the height 55, or more than half of the height 55 of the wall 46. However, as depicted in the embodiment shown in FIG. 5, the rib end outer portions 70 may extend approximately the entire height 55 of the wall 46. In this embodiment, the rib outer end portions 70 terminate adjacent the end surface 51 of the wall 46.

As discussed, each stiffening rib 68 is also attached to the base 48. However, each stiffening rib 68 is separated from its neighboring rib(s) by a portion 82 of the inner surface 60 of the base 48. Additionally, these portions 82 of the base 48 may assume a variety of shapes, sizes and configurations.

For example, in an embodiment best shown in FIG. 3, the portions 82 of the base inner surface 60 separating the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 may have a tapered profile 86. In another embodiment, the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 are positioned so as to form a unitary cross pattern. In this embodiment, the stiffening ribs 68 and their respective side portions 76 are spaced apart from each other at an angle of approximately 90 degrees with respect to the central axis 41 extending through the base. In this embodiment, the base portions 82 may have a generally triangular or pie shape. Also, the base portions 82 may be defined by the rib side portions 76 and the inner surface 50 of the wall 46.

However, those skilled in the art would appreciate that the portions 82 of the base 48 which separate the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 may be provided in a number of alternative shapes or defined in other fashions. Thus, in other embodiments, the portions 82 of the inner surface 60 of the base 48 separating the plurality of stiffening ribs 68 may be generally elliptical, semi-circular, rectangular, or polygonal shaped. Additionally, the base portions 82 may only be partially defined by the rib side portions 76 and/or the inner surface 50 of the wall 46.

Features of the stiffening ribs 68 may also vary between embodiments of the present invention. For example, in the embodiment shown in FIGS. 5-7, the plurality of stiffening

ribs **68** may each comprise a fillet **88** on each side portion **76** adjacent where the stiffening rib **68** attaches to the inner surface **60** of the base **48**. In another embodiment, which is depicted in FIGS. **8-10**, each stiffening rib **68** has a single discrete top surface **80**.

However, it should be appreciated that the present invention may be practiced when the stiffening ribs **68** have a plurality of discrete surfaces or when the discrete surface is not the top surface **80**. For example, in the embodiment shown in FIGS. **11-13**, each stiffening rib **68** has at least four discrete surfaces. In this embodiment, there exists a discrete top surface **81**, a front surface **83**, and side surfaces **85**, **87**. Additionally, each surface **81**, **83**, **85**, **87** has a generally rectangular shape. Those skilled in the art would appreciate that the present invention is not limited to discrete surfaces having only a generally rectangular shape. For example, in a related embodiment shown in FIGS. **14-16**, each stiffening rib **68** has a discrete top surface **89**, front surface **91**, and two side surfaces **93**, **95**. However, the front and top surfaces **89**, **91** have a generally square shape. Whereas, the side surfaces **93**, **95** have a generally triangular shape.

Of course it should be appreciated that the plurality of stiffening ribs **68** need not have surfaces which are discrete in order to practice the present invention. As shown in the embodiments depicted in FIGS. **2** and **5**, the stiffening ribs **68** do not have discrete top, front, or side surfaces. Rather, in these embodiments, the portions **82** of the base inner surface **60** and the plurality of stiffening ribs **68** provide a series of alternating crests and valleys. Thus, along with the wall **46** which surrounds them, the base inner surface **60** and the plurality of stiffening ribs **68** define an undulating cavity **90**.

As depicted in the embodiments illustrated in FIGS. **2**, **5**, **8**, **11** and **14**, the plurality of stiffening ribs **68** are attached to the inner surface **50** of the wall **46** between the inner surface **60** of the base **48** and the end surface **51** of the wall **46**. In these embodiments, a portion of the stiffening ribs **68** between the inner surface **60** of the base **48** and the end surface **51** of the wall **46** gradually decreases the thickness. For example, the thickness of each stiffening rib **68** may gradually decrease from its inner end portion **74** to where its outer end portion **70** is attached to the inner surface **50** of the wall **46**. In another embodiment, the thickness of each stiffening rib **68** may gradually decrease from its side portions **76** to where its outer end portion **70** is attached to the inner surface **50** of the wall **46**. In yet another embodiment, the thickness of each stiffening rib **68** may gradually decrease from its middle portion **72** to where its outer end portion **70** is attached to the inner surface **50** of the wall **46**. Additionally, as shown in FIGS. **2** and **5** the thickness of the unitarily formed stiffening ribs **68** may gradually decrease from adjacent the center portion **64** of the base **48** to the inner surface **50** of the wall **46**, specifically, to where each stiffening rib's outer end portion **70** is attached to the inner surface **50** of the wall **46**.

In an embodiment, each stiffening rib **68** is oriented at an acute angle with respect to the common centerline **49** of the crossholes **47**. In another embodiment, each stiffening rib **68** is oriented at same angle as an adjacent stiffening rib **68** with respect to the common centerline **49** of the crossholes **47**. More specifically, when included as a component of the driveshaft assembly and under certain torque forces, the tube yoke **40** may undergo a certain amount of non-uniform radial deformation. The areas of greatest non-uniform radial tube seat deformation may be adjacent a portion of the tube seat **42** which is oriented at an angle of approximately 45 degrees with respect to the common centerline **49** of the

crossholes **47**. Thus, in an embodiment, each stiffening rib **68** is oriented at an angle of approximately 45 degrees with respect to the common centerline **49** of the crossholes **47**.

It should however be appreciated that the orientation of the stiffening ribs **68** with respect to the lugs **44**, specifically the common centerline **49** of the crossholes **47**, may vary without departing from the scope of the present invention. Additionally, the orientation of the stiffening ribs **68** with respect to the wall **46** and the base **48** may vary without departing from the scope of the present invention.

FIGS. **17-20** depict additional embodiments of a tube yoke **100**, **120** for a driveshaft assembly.

When utilizing the tube yokes **100**, **120** it is preferable that they are attached to a driveshaft tube (not depicted) to form the driveshaft assembly.

As depicted in FIGS. **17** and **18**, in an embodiment the tube yoke **100** comprises a tube seat **102** and the pair of outwardly projecting lugs **44**. The lugs **44** are formed in a unitary manner with the tube seat **102**.

The tube seat **102** comprises the wall **46** and a base **104**. The wall **46** and the base **104** are formed in a unitary manner. Additionally, the wall **46** and the base **104** are concentric about an axis **111**.

The base **104** has an inner surface **106** and outer surface **62**. The inner surface **106** of the base **104** and the inner surface **50** of the wall **46** define an inner surface of the tube seat **102**. The inner surface of the tube seat **102** extends between the inner surface **106** of the base **104** and the end surface **51** of the wall **46**.

The base **104** also has a center portion **108** which extends from the inner surface **106** to the outer surface **62**. The inner surface **106** has edge portions **110** and a rounded middle portion **112**. The middle portion **112** and the edge portions **110** are coaxial and are formed in a unitary manner. In an embodiment, the middle portion **112** is adjacent the center portion **108** and the edge portions **108** completely surround the middle portion **112** separating it from the inner surface **106** of the wall **46**. In another embodiment, the middle portion **112** has a generally conical shape. In this embodiment, the middle portion **112** may also include a semispherical shaped portion.

As best shown in FIG. **18**, the edge portions **110** taper to the middle portion **112** and the wall **46**. Thus, the thickness of the base **104** gradually decreases from the edge portions **110** to the middle portion **112** and from the edge portions **110** to the wall **46** to provide the inner surface of the tube seat **102** with a generally conical shape. In this embodiment, the inner surface of the tube seat **102** may be substantially uniform about the axis **111**. Thus, its conical shape may also be substantially uniform about the axis **111**.

As shown in the embodiment depicted in FIGS. **19** and **20**, the tube yoke **120** comprises a tube seat **122** and the pair of outwardly projecting lugs **44**. The lugs **44** are formed in a unitary manner with the tube seat **122**.

The tube seat **122** comprises a wall **124** and a base **126**. The wall **124** and the base **126** are formed in a unitary manner. Additionally, the wall **124** and the base **126** are concentric about an axis **131**.

The wall **124** has an inner surface **128**, end surface **51**, and outer surface **52**. The base **126** has an inner surface **130** and outer surface **62**. The inner surface **130** of the base **104** and the inner surface **128** of the wall **124** define an inner surface of the tube seat **122**. The inner surface of the tube seat **122** extends between the inner surface **130** of the base **126** and the end surface **51** of the wall **124**.

As best seen in FIG. **20**, the inner surfaces **128**, **130** of the wall **124** and the base **126** provide the inner surface of the

tube seat **122** with a generally conical shape. The inner surface of the tube seat **122** may be substantially uniform about the axis **131**. Thus, its conical shape may also be substantially uniform about the axis **131**.

In this embodiment, the inner surface **128** of the wall **124** tapers from a first end **134** to a second end portion **136**. The second end portion **136** is unitary with the inner surface **130** of the base **126**. The inner surface **130** of the base **126** tapers till it reaches a center portion **132** of the base **126**. The center portion **132** extends from the inner surface **130** to the outer surface **62** of the base **126**. The inner surface **130** of the base **126** adjacent the center portion **132** is rounded such that it may include a generally semispherical shaped portion. Thus, as illustrated and described, the thickness of the tube seat **122** gradually decreases between the inner surface **130** of the base **126** and the end surface **51** of the wall **124**.

It should be appreciated that the tube yokes **40**, **100**, **120** can be made of any suitable material but are preferably metallic. It is also preferable that the tube yokes **40**, **100**, **120** are formed as a unitary body.

Referring back to FIGS. 2-16, the tube yoke **40** having a plurality of stiffening ribs **68** provides a significant reduction in non-uniform radial tube seat deformation experienced by the tube yoke **40** when compared with known tube yoke designs. In fact, in certain embodiments, the non-uniform radial deformation of a tube seat can be reduced to below 0.10 mm. For example, non-uniform radial tube seat deformation of 0.143 mm can be reduced to 0.089 mm for a tube seat for driveshaft assembly with a 4" diameter driveshaft tube. This represents a 38% reduction in non-uniform radial tube seat deformation. The present invention can reduce non-uniform radial deformation of a tube seat for a driveshaft assembly with a 5" diameter driveshaft tube as well. For this tube seat, the non-uniform radial deformation can be reduced from 0.174 mm to 0.102 mm which represents a 41% reduction in non-uniform radial tube seat deformation. Of course, it should be appreciated that the present invention can be utilized to reduce the non-uniform radial deformation of tube seats intended for use in both larger and smaller driveshaft assemblies.

It should be noted that in the above-described examples that the torque force was applied in both a clockwise and a counterclockwise direction. However, the present invention is not limited to a specific direction of applied torque as the present invention can reduce the non-uniform radial deformation of a driveshaft assembly tube yoke regardless of which direction torque is applied to the driveshaft. Thus, the present invention also includes a method of reducing the radial deformation of the tube yoke of a driveshaft assembly.

The method of reducing the radial deformation of a driveshaft assembly comprises providing a driveshaft assembly. The driveshaft assembly includes a driveshaft tube and a tube yoke **40**, **100**, **120**. The driveshaft tube is attached to the tube yoke **40**, **100**, **120**. The tube yoke **40**, **100**, **120** comprises a tube seat **42**, **102**, **122** having a base **48**, **104**, **126** and a wall **46**, **124**.

The method also includes reducing the amount of radial deformation of the tube seat **42**, **102**, **122**. In an embodiment, the amount of radial deformation of the tube seat **42** is reduced by providing a plurality of stiffening ribs **68** attached to the tube seat **42**. In another embodiment, the amount of radial deformation of the tube seat **42**, **102**, **122** may be reduced by forming an inner surface of the tube seat **42**, **102**, **122** with a generally conical shaped portion. The method may further comprise applying a torque to the driveshaft assembly. The magnitude of the torque may vary.

In accordance with the provisions of the patent statutes, this invention has been explained and illustrated in its preferred embodiments. However, it must be understood that this invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically explained and illustrated without departing from its spirit or scope.

What we claim is:

1. A tube yoke for a driveshaft assembly, comprising: a tube seat comprising a base, a wall, and a plurality of stiffening ribs which are attached to the base and the wall, wherein the base gradually decreases in thickness toward a central axis that extends through the base; and
 - a pair of lugs outwardly projecting from the tube seat, wherein each lug has a crosshole and the crossholes are aligned so as to have a common centerline;
 - wherein each stiffening rib is oriented at an acute angle with respect to the common centerline of the crossholes; and
 - wherein each stiffening rib has an outer end portion attached to the inner surface wall, said outer end portion does not extend the full height of the inner surface wall.
2. The tube yoke defined in claim 1, wherein the inner surface of the base comprises a generally semispherical shaped portion.
3. The tube yoke defined in claim 1, wherein the base comprises an edge portion and a center portion, the edge portion separates the center portion from the wall and the base gradually decreases in thickness from the wall to the center portion.
4. The tube yoke defined in claim 3, wherein each stiffening rib comprises an inner end portion and each inner end portion is attached to an inner surface of the base in a unitary manner and terminates adjacent the center portion of the base.
5. The tube yoke defined in claim 4, wherein each stiffening rib is attached to an inner surface of the wall in a unitary manner.
6. The tube yoke defined in claim 4, wherein an inner end portion of each stiffening rib does not touch another stiffening rib at the center portion of the base.
7. The tube yoke defined in claim 3, wherein the stiffening ribs are separated from each other by the center portion of the base.
8. The tube yoke defined in claim 1, wherein the acute angle is equal to approximately 45 degrees.
9. The tube yoke defined in claim 1, wherein said outer end portion of each stiffening rib does not extend across an opening of said wall surrounding each stiffening rib.
10. A tube yoke for a driveshaft assembly, comprising: a tube seat comprising a base, a wall, and a plurality of stiffening ribs which are attached to the base and the wall, wherein the base comprises an edge portion and a center portion, the edge portion separates the center portion from the wall and the base gradually decreases in thickness from the wall to the center portion toward a central axis that extends through the base; and
 - a pair of lugs outwardly projecting from the tube seat, wherein each lug has a crosshole and the crossholes are aligned so as to have a common centerline;
 - wherein each stiffening rib is oriented at an angle of approximately 45 degrees with respect to the common centerline of the crossholes; and

wherein an outer end portion of each stiffening rib is offset from an end surface of said wall surrounding each stiffening rib.

11. A tube yoke for a drive shaft assembly, comprising:
a tube seat comprising a base, a wall, and a plurality of 5
stiffening ribs which are attached to the base and the
wall, wherein the base gradually decreases in thickness
toward a central axis that extends through the base;
a pair of lugs outwardly projecting from the tube seat,
wherein each lug has a crosshole and the crossholes are 10
aligned so as to have a common centerline;
wherein each stiffening rib is oriented at an acute angle
with respect to the common centerline of the crossh-
oles;
wherein each stiffening rib is oriented at an angle of 15
approximately 45 degrees with respect to the common
centerline of the crossholes;
wherein each stiffening rib has an outer end portion
attached to the inner surface wall, said outer end
portion does not extend the full height of the inner 20
surface wall; and
wherein said outer end portion of each stiffening rib does
not extend across an opening of said wall surrounding
each stiffening rib.

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